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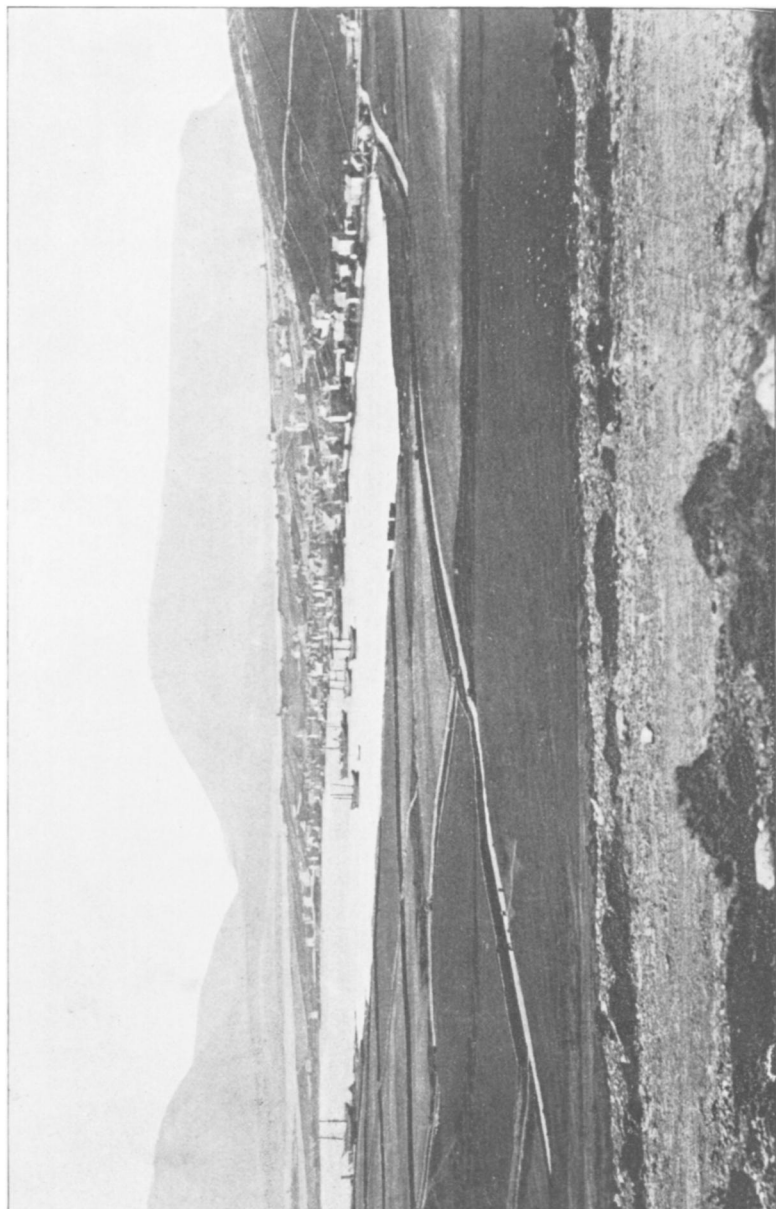
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ORKNEYS AND SHETLAND.

BY

PROF. CHAS. SPRAGUE SMITH.

There is perhaps no region, so easy of access to the European traveller, that offers more fresh and varied interest than the group of islands lying north of Scotland. The student of natural science can follow there in the steps of Hugh Miller and, with his geological hammer and chisel, force open the stone tablets whereon the sea life of a remote past has left its records. The archæologist, who has not made beforehand a special study of this locality, will be amazed at its wealth of rude prehistoric monuments, and the hamlets are so sparsely scattered, the isolated farms so few in number, that it is not hard to think away the present and live for an hour amidst the moving life of the ages and races now extinct. The lover of the wild and the picturesque in nature can gratify also his predilections, without renouncing the nightly shelter and the daily refreshing offered by simple and comfortable hostelries.

The Pentland firth, that separates the Orkney islands from Scotland, is less than nine miles in width at its broadest point opposite Hay, while Duncansbay head,

Scotland's northeastern cape, is only about six miles distant, from the nearest point of South Ronaldshay (Rognvald's island) the southernmost large island of the group. Mid-channel lie the smaller islands of Stroma and Svona and the rocky islets known as the Pentland Skerries. The actual separation of the archipelago from Scotland is thus insignificant, but the tides that sweep through this narrow channel and between the islands have a royal movement and, if they run counter to the wind, a mighty tussling ensues.

One familiar with Orcadian gales describes them thus: " All distinction between air and water is lost, the nearest objects are obscured by spray and everything seems enveloped in a thick smoke. Upon the open coast, the sea striking upon the rocky shores rises in foam for several hundred feet and spreads over the whole country; . . . rocks of many tons in weight are lifted from their beds; the roar of the surge may be heard for twenty miles; the breakers rise to the height of sixty feet."*

Under ordinary conditions, however, the passage across from Thurso, Scotland, is only a somewhat protracted ferriage and the swaying of the ocean-floor only sufficient to add zest to the few hours' voyage.

The traveller, therefore, who is imbued with the customary ignorance of geographical details, is surprised and delighted on rounding Duncansbay head to find, instead of a barren turbulent channel some 50 miles in width, the sea in front blossoming as it were immediately into foam encircled islets, while the whole horizon to the north is crowded with larger islands, separated the one

* " The Orkneys and Shetland," by John R. Tudor, p. 198.

from the other by winding passages of inconsiderable dimensions.

There are said to be 56 islands in the Orkney cluster, of which 30 are inhabited. Hardly one fourth of the islands however are large enough to rank as independent members of the group. The largest island, called "Pomona"* or "The Mainland," is, to judge by the eye, equal in dimensions to the combined area of all the other islands. Its greatest length is approximately 25 miles and breadth 15 miles. The main axis of the group is N. E. and S. W. of the mainland and several of the other larger islands N. W. and S. E.

The characteristic feature of the Orkney group of islands is the low rounded central ridge, sloping gradually on both sides to the sea. The upper courses of the hills are brown with a dense growth of heather, the lower occupied by farms.

The brown unreclaimed land however often holds apparently the entire slope from crest to shore-line.

There is a vivid suggestion here of the clearing, where tillage and meadow-land are steadily sturdily making inroads upon the original domain of the forest.

† Here the earlier tenant was of course the heather, for trees do not grow in the islands, save in especially favored localities, or where artificially cultivated, and do not therefore form a feature of the landscape. And, if we may trust the old Norse records, there were no forests in the islands at the time of their conquest by

* Called Hrossey, horse-island, by the Norsemen.

† In the *Heimskringla*, (edited by Unger) page 69, we read "He (*i. e.*, Einar) was called Torf-Einar because he caused peat (*torf*) to be cut and used as fire-wood; for there was no wood in the Orkneys."—Einar was one of the first Orkney earls.

Harald the fair-haired, King of Norway (close of 9th century).

Among the southern islands, Hoy (Há-ey—high island) is the most picturesque. Its bold, precipitous sea-walls of old red sandstone and its solitary rock pillar 450 feet in height, known as the “Old Man of Hoy,” give to it a place apart among the islands of the group. Its rough-hewn shore line is one of the boldest and most interesting formations of that character in Great Britain.

My own impressions of the Orkney islands as a group are derived from a sunset-glimpse north and south from the vantage ground of Wideford hill (740 feet high), back of Kirkwall, the capital of the Orkneys, and from a delightful summer afternoon sauntering on shipboard northward, with the islands to east and west almost within hailing distance.

Yet, in a broad sense, to have seen one island is to have seen all; the general features are the same; though some of those to the north are so low lying, that it is difficult to determine from a near distance where the line of demarcation between sea and land is drawn.

The first outlook from one of nature's sentinel towers over an unfamiliar landscape is not soon forgotten. I shall always remember the magnificent sense of being poised mid-air, that came when, having gained the crest of one of the higher peaks in the western Adirondacks, nothing met my eyes but close pressed forests, with lakes dotted here and there and the long lines of hills, wearing still their native garb.

The Orkney hill-top was gained about nine o'clock

of a July evening just after sunset. There was no dazzling glare of horizontal rays in the west to bewilder the vision, and no clouds save in the north to veil the landscape. Island behind island, the archipelago lay strewn about me, with darkening stretches of blue and black water between, roosts, as the islanders call them, or swift tidal races. The northern peaks of Scotland, Morven and the hills of Sutherland, softened by the paling light into cloud mountains, limited the view southward.

The monuments of the prehistoric races, tumuli, isolated monoliths and stone circles, stretched from the foot of the hill westward across the mainland in an interrupted chain.

I had but to turn to my companion, a canny Orkneyman, combining the grocer, the baker and the archæologist, to realize fully the present conditions here under the influence of Scotch thrift; while the darkening tidal-ways vividly recalled the strong cruel age of the Vikings, and the stones of Stenness, dimly outlined against the western sky, spoke of the half mythical, half historical Pictish traditions.

As one leaves the Orkneys behind, ere the last lighthouse on the northernmost sand-spit is lost to view, an island is seen far to the north-east. Fair island (Frithar-ey—Island of peace, according to the Saga) lies about midway between the Orkneys and Shetland, being some twenty-five miles distant from each group. It is, however, considered as belonging to the latter. Its shores are seldom visited, though mail-steamers pass almost daily within a few miles of its cliffs.

There is thus no severing of the land-tie upon this

northern journey, since, before Fair-isle is reached, the southernmost promontories of Shetland-mainland come into view and soon, far away to the west, the bold beautiful form of Foula (Norse Fogl or Fugl-ey, bird-island) the outlying member of the Shetland group. When about 9 P. M. we came abreast of Sumburgh-head, Shetland's southeasternmost cape, all of nature's manifestations were attuned, as it were, into harmony with the bolder landscape. The air was more cold and crisp, the sea more masterful; there was a sense of power pervading everything, every buffet of the wind, every swell and toss of the wave. The Norsemen called this stretch of sea betwixt Fair-isle and Shetland Dyn-röst, the dinning or thundering race.

Shetland is said to consist of about 100 islands, great and small. Here however, more markedly even than in the Orkneys, one island predominates. The Mainland, so-called, *i. e.*, the main island, is according to Tudor, some 70 miles in length, by 30 in its greatest breadth.

Its coast is however so cleft by fissures of varying width, that no part is more than three miles distant from the sea. Beside the mainland and the isolated islands, Foula and Fair-isle, only Unst, Fetlar and Yell properly rank as independent members of the group.

The main axis of this group is north and south, slightly N. E. and S. W., of the more important islands the same. All the islands with the exception of Fair-isle and Foula are so closely massed, as to seem parts of one whole. The extreme north and south dimension of the group between Sumburgh head and Muckle Flugga light-house is, according to my measurements,

seventy miles. From Muckle Flugga light-house to Duncansbay head, Scotland, is about 150 miles, while the north and south measurement of the Orkneys gives about fifty miles.

The northern group differs in almost every particular from the southern, from the character of its rock-formations to that of its people. Those who have explored the western coast with its numberless fissures, geos, voes, wicks and firths* describe the Shetland coast-line as a miniature Norway. My own observation extends only so far as the vision can reach from hills near Lerwick, the capital, and from excursions on foot and in *machine* south and west of that point.

To one familiar with Norway, the Faroes and eastern Iceland, the physical contours of the Shetland group afford a distinct reminiscence of the still bolder, and more impressive scenery of northern Scandinavia. The dorsal ridge of the Shetland islands is sharp, not rounded as in the Orkneys. The upper courses of the hills are usually clothed with heather, but not infrequently bare of vegetation, either through denudation, or because the turf has been stripped off for fuel. At the base of the angle of sharp descent, there is a black peat deposit sloping far down toward the sea-line.

Only a narrow fringe of farm-land, green meadow and garden extends along the coast. There is thus no suggestion here, as in the Orkneys, of a fruitful effort on the part of man to redeem nature's waste-places. The struggle under normal conditions would be indeed apparently hopeless. In valleys back from the sea, how-

* Voe, a long narrow bay (Norse Vágr) ; geo a rocky creek or inlet (Norse Gjá=a rift) ; wick an open bay (Norse Vík).

ever, notably in Tingwall, the garden of Shetland, the natural conditions are more favorable to agriculture ; but, so far as my observation reaches, the Shetland tenant farmer or crofter must look almost entirely to the sea as his source of support. It is a common saying in the islands, that the Shetlander is a fisherman owning a small farm, the Orkneyman a farmer owner of a fishing smack.

While the general impression received from the Orkney islands is that the condition of the farming class is one of comparative comfort, the reverse is true of the Shetland islands. Nature has built here a strong bulwark against the storms of the North Atlantic, and, whether she smiles or frowns the traveller can share her mood and draw rich inspiration therefrom, but not so the crofter. The meagre strip of tillable land is furthermore accursed by the dower of mediæval conditions and, from the humanitarian stand-point, it is a mournful sight to observe how here, as in a considerable section of enlightened Great Britain to-day, the masses are still enslaved.

The distinctive characteristics of Shetland life cannot be seen until the towns have been left behind. No matter how remote from the highways of the world's commerce and pleasure travel be the land visited, the cities are found to have exchanged in some degree, at least outwardly, their indigenous qualities for a certain cosmopolitan veneer. Even Reykjavik, Iceland's capital, forms no exception.

Leaving the towns behind then and sauntering along the highways or across fields, we observe the seaward slope of the hills scantily dotted with little clusters of grimy

stone cottages, repellent enough, but not more uninviting than the typical crofter's-house in northern Scotland or in the Hebrides. Rude dykes separate each group of cottages from the scathold or pasture land outside. Such a cluster of crofts is called a *toon*, or town, a transition stage in the evolution from the Old Norse *tún* (pronounced *toon*), a single enclosed holding, to the English



CROFTERS' COTTAGES NEAR LERWICK, SHETLAND.

town. The section of arable land within the dykes, belonging to each crofter, is usually distinctly separated from that of his fellows though, rarely, the whole is cultivated in *runrig*,* that is, in common. The separate holdings vary from three to ten acres. Oats, *bere* (a kind of barley) and potatoes form the principal crops.

* Land of different tenants is mixed up in alternate ridges or furrows.

The grass growing along the drains that intersect the fields, and a few chance green wisps in the meadows furnish the only hay crop. Each crofter has, beside his section of arable land within the dykes, unlimited right of pasturage in the scathold or hill-pastures held in common by several tenants. The domestic animals, cattle, sheep and horses, are all Scandinavian in origin and diminutive in stature.* The famous Shetland pony, with the introduction of roads, is disappearing; a breed of greater draught-power, such as the Welsh pony, or even the horse, taking his place.

According to Tudor* : "the crofter's cottage was formerly a windowless, chimneyless cabin, to reach which you had to pass through the *byre*, or cattle-shed, that was separated from the human habitation only by the box-beds, that served as resting places for the higher animals." At present, however, the *byre* is usually distinct from the crofter's cottage. This latter consists of two apartments, the *but* and *ben*. The *but* has no floor save the bare earth. There is a fire-place in the centre, but no chimney for the escape of the smoke. The *ben* is generally floored and its fire-place furnished with the added luxury and extravagance of a chimney. The furniture is of the rudest character, consisting of chairs, stools, a wooden sofa, perhaps, and the box-beds. Above the *but* and the *ben* there are rude cock-lofts.

Personally, I visited only a single crofter's-house, lured thither by the bait of deftly woven Shetland shawls and the grandmotherly persuasions of a wily peasant woman. Had I not mother, or wife, or child, who were expecting some woolly mementoes of my Shet-

* See Tudor's *Orkneys and Shetland*, chap. XII.

land pilgrimage? Were my feet and fingers not aching to be enwrapped within the warm meshes of Shetland socks and mittens? The home was far more comfortable than the typical crofter's house just described, but this greater luxury might be explained by the sybaritic influence of the neighboring capital.

A characteristic feature of the rural districts of Shetland is the rude mill. Where walls of rock enclose conveniently a descending brooklet, the Shetlander poises his tiny mill. It is just large enough to spread a roof over the slowly circling stone and allow the peasant miller to sit idly beside it. A stout vertical shaft, riveted to the upper mill-stone, passes through an aperture in the lower. A number of rude boards are jointed to its base, at such an angle as to receive and communicate to the upper stone the momentum of the water. The optical effect is that of a wheel, whose spokes are revolving upon the same plane with the stream, instead of at right angles to it.

A Shetland landscape, when mists, dense with vapor almost as the clouds, are dragging their cold dripping folds over bare hill-side and black moorland, is desolate in the extreme. The thatch resembles straw, that has been rotting in the compost heap. The stone huts are dripping at every projecting angle of their dingy walls. The smoke escapes apparently quite as much by the door ajar as by the hole in the roof, rudely fashioned or not into some semblance to a chimney-pot. The peat-bogs, cut with deep black pits and trenches, reek with oily exhalations. A few gaunt sheep are pasturing by the road-side. Women are seen, crofter's wives and daughters, rearranging the peat-stacks, that line the

trenches, or bending low down under their over-filled peat baskets the while their fingers ply perhaps the knitting needles. Men are rarely seen at work, save at intervals a forlorn-looking cowherd. The passer by receives the distinct impression that incapacity, through age or feebleness, has doomed this individual to so unmanly an occupation. It is said indeed by those familiar with the islands, that the men leave the greater portion of the work ashore to their industrious wives and daughters.

But, forget, if you can, the miserable conditions of the crofter's lot and, crossing one of the swift tidal races, that separate the outer islets from the mainland, climb the Noup of Noss.

The ferryman, who has piloted you across the 100 feet or more of water, has had a hard struggle with the swiftly rolling waves, that threatened in their splendid rush to carry boat and all far out to sea. The promontory (Noup, Norse gnúpr, a peak or promontory) slopes gently up from the landside, but the sea has torn away its eastern slope and is undermining the foundations of the western. On all sides it is cut in rough sheer precipices from crest to shore-line, and beneath has been honeycombed by the breakers. This is the home of the sea-birds and the fog-sprent air their natural element. In grand, strong spirals of flight, inward and outward, upward and downward, move the grey and white gulls. You bend over the cliff and, 500 feet and more below* other circles are coiling in and out among the pillared caves, while the water is dotted as with some shimmering winged insect-life. To northward and southward,

* Height of headland 592 feet.

Shetland's capes, appearing, disappearing, reappearing, stretch their gaunt grey arms far out into the sea. The kiss of the storm is upon your cheek, the cries of the storm-birds and the blended roar of the wind and the surf in your ears. Out of such elements as these was formed the warp of northern poetry and the sunlight, that shall fill to-morrow this strong, desolate world with its burnished rays, furnished the woof.

I discovered during my stay in the Orkneys nothing in the conditions of the farming class, that was so unhackneyed and suggestive, as that everywhere present in Shetland. The Orcadian peasant's house, while rude and primitive, bears outward testimony to thrift and internal comfort. The picturesque desolation of the black, sodden Shetland moors and wretched *toons* is entirely absent. The Orcadian peasant seems also more prosperous, more alert than the Shetland crofter. Those,* however, who have seen the Shetlanders at the *haaf*, or deep-sea fishing stations, describe them as physically a magnificent race of men, distinctly Norse in type, tall, fair-haired and blue-eyed. The sea is indeed the element that should attract and develop the highest type of Shetland manhood.

Tudor's testimony fully confirms my own impressions with regard to the prosperity of the Orcadian peasantry.† "The Orkneys, at the present time (1883)," he says, "are probably as thriving as any portion of Her Majesty's dominions. During four months spent in wandering to and fro in the islands, in 1880, the writer never once saw a bare-footed man, woman or child, nor

* Tudor, page 161.

† Tudor, page 107.

was he once accosted by a beggar. Bankruptcy among the farmers has never been known and over a million (pounds) was stated to be lying on deposit in the banks, to the credit of the farmers and peerie (petty) lairds."

The cities of Orkney and Shetland consist mainly of single, narrow, winding streets following the coast-line. These are paved usually with broad slabs and lined with houses of varying height, architecture and age, none, however, or the fewest, offering especial interest.

I found the better class of the citizens intelligent, well-informed and hospitable. The Orkney man seems in every respect a Scotchman, while the Shetlander has not altogether lost the imprint of the Norse colonization. The Scandinavian language, as I was informed, survived in remote districts of Shetland until a recent period. The population of the Orkneys in 1881 was 32,037 souls; of Shetland, 29,709;* of Kirkwall, 3,923; of Lerwick, 3,500. The acreage under cultivation in the Orkneys was 108,795 acres; in Shetland, 58,437; under grain, Orkneys, 38,294 acres; Shetland, 10,774. (Total acreage of Orkneys and Shetland, 598,726.) Average yearly temperature at Bressay opposite Lerwick, Shetland, 45.4° (Fahrenheit); at Kirkwall, Orkneys 45.9°. Average August temperature, hottest month, 54.8° in Shetland (Bressay); 54.7° Orkneys (Kirkwall); January, coldest month, 38.9° Shetland; 38.6° Orkneys.

The history of these islands is interesting. Originally they were inhabited by Pictish tribes, who were converted to Christianity, probably by some of the followers of Columba, that famous saint who, in the sixth

* In 1831, Orkneys, 28,847; Shetland, 29,392. 1861, Orkneys, 32,395; Shetland, 31,670.

century, founded a cloister in Iona and became the apostle of the Picts. Toward the close of the eighth century, Norse vikings began to establish themselves there, the islands offering a convenient centre for their piratical expeditions north and south. In the following century, Harald the fair-haired reduced all of Norway under his sceptre. At this time the great emigration to Iceland took place. A large number of Harald's enemies sought refuge in the southern islands and from thence were ever returning to harry Norway. Harald resolved to rid his coasts of this scourge and undertook, therefore, an expedition (880-84) against the islands, that resulted in their union with the Norwegian crown. The islands remained under Scandinavian control, governed vicariously by earls or directly by the crown, until 1468. Denmark, Sweden and Norway formed at that time one kingdom. A dispute had arisen between Christian the First, king of the three northern states, and James the Second, of Scotland, and it was agreed to settle it by the marriage of Margaret of Denmark and the heir of the Scottish crown. To offset the dowry given by James, Christian pledged first the Orkneys and then Shetland to the Scottish crown, with right of redemption. The forfeit money was never paid and the islands remain *de facto* a possession of the kings of Great Britain. The history of the islands, during the Norse period, is full of dramatic interest and no one should visit that archipelago, whose nomenclature and memories are so entirely Norse, without first reading the record contained in the Orkneyinga Saga.

But there is a more remote and mysterious civilization than the Norse, whereof these islands guard rich

vestiges. It is generally agreed that the rude prehistoric monuments found here are the work of Pictish peoples, although some authorities (not the best nor the most numerous) would assign to the Norsemen the round stone towers.

The prehistoric monuments of the Orkneys and Shetland, consist of the brochs, or circular towers; the stone-circles and isolated standing stones; the cham-



BROCH OF MOUSA, SHETLAND.

bered mounds or cairns; the underground dwellings, styled variously eirde-houses, weems or hypogea, and the burial mounds or barrows.

The best specimen of the first of these structures is found in the Shetland islands, and is known as the Broch of Mousa. (Of 374 known broch-sites, 75 are in Shetland, 70 in the Orkneys, and 139 in the two northern counties of Scotland, Caithness and Sutherland.)

The broch is a hollow circular tower of dry-built masonry, with an exterior diameter varying from 70 to 40 feet. The mean height of the brochs, according to the best authorities, was about 50 feet. From without, it presents an unbroken surface, the only aperture being the low entrance to the interior court.

In certain cases, the tower was protected by out-works. The broch of Clickemin, *e. g.*, stands upon a holm or islet in a fresh water loch, just outside of Lerwick. A long narrow land spit, or causeway, leads from the shore to the islet, and over this a covered guarded passage seems to have been carried, affording the only entrance to the broch. The entire islet was surrounded by a strong wall of circumvallation, and still further protected by a guard-house, in the form of a segment of a circle, placed on the land-side between wall and tower.

The thickness of the walls of a typical broch is about 15 feet. Up to a height of 8 feet, the wall is solid save where space has been left for 2 or 3 oblong chambers, with rudely vaulted roofs, connecting with the central court. Above the height of 8 feet, the wall divides into two sections with an interspace, some 3 feet in width. Here a gallery, formed of stone-slabs, encircles the tower between inner and outer wall. This gallery connects by a flight of steps with the court below and is lighted at regular intervals by openings pierced in the inner wall. There are several tiers of these galleries, varying in height from 5 to 6 feet. The flight of steps leading to the higher gallery forms, in every instance, a solid partition wall in the lower tier. These towers do not seem to have been either

roofed or floored, and the purpose and period of their construction can only be conjectured.

Save for the brochs of Mousa and Clickemin, the archæological interest of the islands, however, centres distinctly in the southern archipelago.

From Scapa in the south-east of the mainland, Orkneys, to Skail in the west, there is almost a continuous line of interesting prehistoric structures. "Nowhere else," says Tudor, "upon British soil are found so many relics of the prehistoric past, as in the six or seven miles of Orcadian soil, which commence with the chambered mound of Maeshowe and end with the weem of Skara Brae."

I was initiated almost immediately, upon my arrival in the Orkneys, into the mysteries of local archæology. A stone's throw below the crest of Wideford hill, there is a chambered mound, that was opened some forty years ago. After sunset, we descended the slope and my Kirkwall friend guided me to the edge of a pit, half filled with stones, thrown in by idle urchins.

We had soon cleared the pit, and my companion, lying prone upon the ground, pushed himself feet foremost under a projecting slab and disappeared in the darkness, bidding me follow. I did so, though not without difficulty, and, by the light of a match, saw that we were in a small vaulted chamber of beehive construction, some 6 feet in height. Originally a low narrow passage, 15 inches high and 22 broad, led from without to a central chamber (the pit we first entered) and, from this in turn, other similar passages to 3 or 4 side chambers. The whole masonry was then covered by a mound of earth. A similar principle of construction

obtains in all the chambered Orcadian mounds of which Maeshowe is at once the most conspicuous and the best preserved. It is assumed, that these mounds were used as dwelling places and the narrow dimensions of the passages have either given birth to the tradition, or served to corroborate it, that the Picts or *Pechts* were a race of dwarfs. Tudor is unaware of the existence of any chambered mounds in the Shetland islands.

Widford hill and my friend's rich archæological collection, with its spoils from brochs, chambered mounds and barrows, opened pleasantly and suggestively for me the volume of Orcadian antiquities. On the following day, taking the *machine* from Kirkwall, I dismounted half-way between the 9th and 10th mile post. There, with Maeshowe, begins that unique file of rude prehistoric monuments. In my own experience, I know of nothing comparable, in vivid suggestiveness of a remote past, to this walk, unless it be the stroll along the Via Appia to the tomb of Cecilia Metella and beyond, or the ride from Naples to Cumæ. Indeed, the Latin civilization, on account of its closer kinship with our own, seems less remote in time than that prehistoric northern life.

Maeshowe, or the maiden's mound, as it has been translated, was formerly known to the Orcadians by the euphonious name of "the abode of the Hog-boy." Hog-boy, however, is simply a perversion of the Norse *Haug-búi* or mound dweller. It is an imposing mound, 36 feet in height by 92 in diameter, and stands in the centre of a circular platform, 270 feet in diameter. This is in turn surrounded by a trench 40 feet wide, and from 4 to 8 feet deep. A covered passage, 54 feet in

length, conducts to the central chamber. This passage can be traversed with comparative ease in a stooping posture. The central chamber is spacious, and the side chambers are reduced to mere pockets in the walls, varying in height from 3 feet 4 inches, to 3 feet 6 inches. There are various rune-scratchings and other Norse inscriptions, such as a dragon and a worm-knot, traced upon the walls, indicating that the mound was frequently visited by the Northmen. It was called by them *Orkahaug** (perhaps connected with old Norse *Orka*, to be strong to work, and meaning the strong howe).

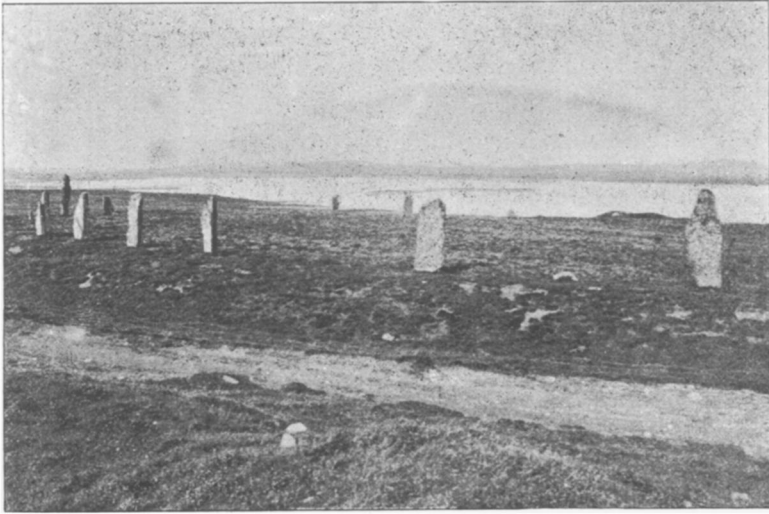
On returning to the road, we are soon arrested by a tall monolith, rising in the midst of a field of grain, one of the many isolated standing stones scattered about the islands. Whether these were intended to serve as way-marks, as memorials of the dead, or for some devotional purpose, is uncertain. A half mile further, we reach the stones of Stenness (stone promontory), the first of three stone circles† standing in close proximity. It consisted originally of a low truncated mound, some 3 feet high and 104 feet in diameter, surrounded by a broad ditch, and this in turn by an embankment. Only three of the original circle of stones remain, two erect, one, the largest, prostrate. Its dimensions are 19 feet by 5 feet, by 1 foot and 8 inches. Its weight is conjectured to be 10.71 tons. On the western side of the circle are the remains of a cromlech.

About 150 yards north of the ring of Stenness, stood

* *Orkneyinga Saga*, p. 187 ; edited by Gudbrand Vigfússon.

† There are 5 stone circles in Shetland, 3 in Unst, 2 in Fetlar, but they are composed of smaller stones laid flat on the ground.

formerly a monolith, similar to the others, but with a hole cut through it near the centre. This was called the Stone of Odin, and played quite an important rôle in the local customs and traditions. This stone together with three others, forming part of the Ring of Stenness, is said to have been converted in 1814 by a tenant farmer, a foreigner, into rubble wherewith to construct byres or cattle sheds. The firm hand of the law inter-



STONES OF STENNESS, ORKNEY.

vened to check the vandalism, and the fellow was so thoroughly boycotted by the indignant peasantry that he left the country.

From the stones of Stenness, the path slopes down to the Bridge of Brogar, a narrow causeway between two broad fresh-water lochs, Stenness and Harray. At the eastern end of the bridge, as I passed, workmen were demolishing what appeared to be a prehistoric mound,

in order to use the material for broadening the causeway. Close to the bridge, rises the solitary monolith, known as the Watch-Stone (16 feet in height,) and it is well named. It seems to stand as a sentinel at the entrance of some primeval Holy of Holies. For when the bridge is passed, tumuli abound on every side, and in the centre rises the circle of Brogar. Thirteen slabs are still erect, 10 lying prostrate, out of perhaps 60 that composed the original circle. Their average height is 9 feet, the tallest being 13 feet 9 inches in height above the ground. The diameter of the circle is 340 feet, and this is surrounded by a broad and deep moat crossed at east and west by narrow causeways. In the centre are the remains of some structure, perhaps a cromlech.

Orcadian peasants formerly called the Ring of Brogar the temple of the sun, and that of Stenness, the temple of the moon. On the first day of each new year, there was a gathering of the country folk at the Kirk of Stenness, near the stone of Odin. In feasting and dancing the hours and days sped. Naturally, in the unwonted rest from toil and boisterous merry making, the god of love found and improved his opportunity. When the hearts of man and maid were finally agreed, setting forth together from the company of their kinsfolk and friends, they sought the temple of the moon. There, in the man's presence and hearing, the maiden knelt and prayed to Odin to help her to be faithful to her lover. Thence to the temple of the sun, where the man in his turn besought the succor of the higher powers. Finally, their hearts and minds confirmed by this consecration in wish and purpose, they went to the stone of Odin and, standing, one on one side, the other on the other,

clasped hands through the aperture and swore a solemn oath to be faithful each to the other.

Though it was a sacrilegious and despicable thing to break such an oath, it is reported that another custom, equally valid, facilitated the loosing of a tie thus solemnly contracted, if subsequently proven irksome. Husband and wife betook them as before to the Kirk of Stenness and then separated, the one going out by the north door, the other by the southern, to single blessedness, or to second nuptials, as they chose.

A mile more of the roadway passed brings us to the Ring of Bukan, a circle of a similar character to Stenness and Brogar, but of smaller dimensions. Here all traces of the monoliths, if any once existed, have disappeared. Thence we may saunter on for several miles, with nothing but the backward look to suggest the past, and exchanging greetings with the wayfaring peasants, catch a few glimpses of Orcadian life and thought. A farmer is repairing his stone hut with slabs of old red sandstone quarried not far away. While we are sitting upon his door-step for a brief quarter of an hour, questioning and questioned, he brings forth from within doors specimens of fossil-fishes, ichthyolites, that would kindle envy and delight in any geologist's eyes.

Abandoning the road-side and climbing the brae, all clad in gala-robes of magenta heather-bloom, we descend its western slope and knock at the door of a modest farm-house. A little shoeless lassie guides us through the cow-yard and across fields to a stone wall. Just beyond are the Stones of Via, the remains of a cromlech. If the afternoon be not already far spent we can devote its remaining hours to inspecting the Weem

of Skara Brae, a series of cell-like underground chambers, arranged on either side of an irregular passage.

Of burial mounds, over 2000 specimens can be numbered in the Orkneys alone.* They are believed to be both Pictish and Scandinavian in origin.

I have nowhere come into such close touch with the prehistoric past, as in these islands. The very desolation of the environment, the almost entire absence at times of any near objects that suggest the present, leave the mind free from the intrusion of the forms of modern life and permit a retrogression in thought far back into the past. The devout spirit to-day, with the ever changing yet changeless arch of blue and clouds above, and the eternal, yet ever shifting forms and colors of nature in lakes, sea, meadow and mountains environing, can worship, as the devout spirit worshipped unnumbered centuries ago, within the stone circle of Brogar and before the crumbling fragments, remains of a rude altar.

And if a storm, strong, swift, sullen, is moving southward, shrouding the line of the hills along the northern horizon and its shadow, dun and cold, is advancing steadily toward you across the northern loch, while the loch to the south, the moor, the yellow, sparkling sea and the brown hills of Hoy are all glowing with the light, the life and the joy of a clear summer morning, you will turn away from the world of sunlight to the world of shadow and welcome that weird, strong presence, that is moving toward you, mantled with the gloom of the storm.

As the headlands of Shetland invite to communion

* Tudor, page 16, testimony of Captain Thomas.

with the Norse spirit, so the rude stone circles of the Orkneys to communion with the prehistoric spirit.*

* We have not referred in this paper to the monuments of mediæval architecture existing in these islands, of which the St. Magnus Cathedral at Kirkwall is the most important. Other interesting monuments are the ruins of the earl's palace and of the bishop's palace at Kirkwall, of the ancient church of St. Magnus, Egilsay, Orkneys, and of Earl Patrick's castle at Scalloway, Shetland. For a full description of everything relating to the islands, the reader is referred to Tudor's work previously cited.